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## NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Elliot Krieger, Communications – (401) 222-8471  
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### **Commissioner Gist Approves Providence School-Reform Plans Education Department Identifies Five Schools for 2011 Intervention**

Education Commissioner Deborah A. Gist announced today (March 29, 2011) that the R.I. Department of Education (RIDE) has approved plans for transforming four schools in Providence and has awarded the Providence Public School Department federal funds to put the plans into action.

To ensure the success of reform initiatives in these four schools, the Providence School Department Superintendent Thomas M. Brady and the Providence Teachers Union President Steven F. Smith earlier this month signed a “Joint PSD/PTU Compact for School Transformation,” which states that “the parties will provide flexible and joint problem-solving mechanisms to allow schools to implement innovative, student-centered reform agendas that will drive and support measurable and sustainable improvements in student achievement.”

“It is important to credit teachers and students for the progress some schools are making. But it is unacceptable for any school in Providence to be persistently low-achieving,” said Providence Mayor Angel Taveras. “Our children need and deserve an education that will enable them to reach their full potential. School administration and union leadership must work together to accelerate the implementation of newly approved transformation plans at schools previously identified by RIDE as low-achieving and quickly develop intervention plans for the new set of identified schools. Our kids are depending on us to do what needs to be done to create immediate and sustainable improvements to teaching and learning at every school, especially at those which we know are significantly underachieving.”

“I am very pleased that the administration and the teachers union are working together in the best interest of the students of Providence,” Commissioner Gist said. “By building a strong partnership between labor and management and by closely engaging parents and other stakeholders in the community, the Providence School Department has taken a major step toward accelerating its lowest-achieving schools toward greatness.”

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The four schools, which RIDE identified last year as among the lowest achieving in the state, are:

The B. Jae Clanton Complex (Charlotte Woods and Sergeant Cornel Young, Jr., Elementary Schools)

The Juanita Sanchez Complex (Providence Academy of International Studies and William B. Cooley Health Science Technology High School)

Lillian Feinstein Elementary School at Sackett Street

Roger Williams Middle School

The [plans for transformation](#) of each of these schools are posted on the Providence Public Schools Web site.

In approving the four school-reform plans, Commissioner Gist awarded \$600,000 in federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) funds to put the plans into action. The award covers the period from April through September; Providence will be eligible to apply for more funds during the next school year.

“The awarding of School Improvement Grants is an important step in redesigning the approaches taken to turning around schools that have struggled for many years,” Commissioner Gist said. “I am confident that, through collaborative and focused efforts, the Providence schools and the Providence Teachers Union can bring this plan to fruition.”

Under the RIDE protocol for interventions, districts with persistently low-achieving schools must “engage affected family and community members in the work of reforming” these schools. Community members, will serve on “stakeholder groups” to advise the superintendent on turning around these schools. Additionally, districts must put in place “ongoing mechanisms for meaningful and periodic family and community engagement in appropriate languages,” as well as a communications strategy and a transportation plan that accommodates students’ needs.

Today (March 29) RIDE also identified five additional persistently low-achieving schools for intervention in 2011:

- Dr. Jorge Alvarez High School, Providence
- Hope Information Technology School, Providence
- Mary E. Fogarty Elementary School, Providence
- Mount Pleasant High School, Providence
- Rhode Island School for the Deaf

RIDE identified the persistently lowest-achieving schools based on:

- Schoolwide student performance in mathematics and reading;
- No Child Left Behind classifications;
- Student growth percentile at elementary- and middle-school levels in reading and mathematics and, at high-school levels, graduation rates; and
- Schoolwide improvement in reading and mathematics.

“Providence has had an opportunity to look deeply at our strengths and needs through the process associated with the first round of persistently lowest-achieving schools,” said Providence Schools Superintendent Thomas M. Brady. “While the need for reform in our schools is clearly urgent, we are encouraged that the lessons learned through this process will help us to expedite reform for these schools named in the second round.”

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“As the chair of the Rhode Island School for the Deaf Board of Trustees, I speak for both the Board and the school in confirming our unwavering commitment to the young people who are at the center of this effort: our students. Their needs are unique. Yet that uniqueness only means that we must work harder and do more to ensure that they are able to surpass our highest expectations,” said Travis Zellner. “The Board of Trustees is ready to take on the challenges brought with this designation. We will seek input from all stakeholders – Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing educators, special educators, parents, students, and members of the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing community – to select a reform model and craft a plan that is best for our students. The designation is therefore not an impediment but rather an opportunity. It will accelerate the process we have begun of creating a school that will provide a high-quality education for all Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing children in the State of Rhode Island, and beyond.”

For each school identified, stakeholder groups, made up in part of parents, teachers, students, and representatives of social-service, health, child-welfare, and workforce-development agencies, will advise the superintendent or board chairman on the selection of a school-reform model.

The four potential school-reform models are:

**Turnaround**, which requires a new principal, screening of staff and rehiring of no more than 50 percent, a new governance structure, better use of instructional data, expanded learning time, and social-emotional and community-oriented services and supports for students;

**Restart**, in which the school reopens under a regional collaborative, a charter-school operator or management organization, an educational-management organization, or a joint labor-management compact;

**School closure**, in which the district closes the school and enrolls students in other schools that are higher achieving; or

**Transformation**, replace the principal (unless the principal was recently selected for reform purposes), rigorous evaluations that include rewards for increasing student achievement and removal of those who do not improve their professional practice, instructional reform, increased learning time, ongoing community engagement, and operational flexibility regarding staffing and budgeting.

Superintendent Brady and Board Chairman Zellner will each convene stakeholder groups for the identified schools within 30 days. With input from these groups, they will select one of the options within 45 days. Commissioner Gist will respond to the selection within 10 days. The school leaders and the stakeholder groups will then have no more than 120 days to draft a comprehensive school-reform plan that the district or school will implement over the next three years, though all are encouraged to move as quickly as they are able.

If Providence or the School for the Deaf cannot fulfill their obligations to select and implement a reform plan, RIDE and the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education may take over any of the schools, under provisions of state law, and restructure it or close it.

The RIDE protocol for interventions and the methods for identifying the lowest-achieving schools are based on guidance from the U.S. Department of Education regarding the use of funds for high-poverty schools (Title I) and the Race to the Top grant application guidance. RIDE has posted the protocol on its Web site, at:

[http://www.ride.ri.gov/ride/Docs/Protocol\\_for\\_Interventions.pdf](http://www.ride.ri.gov/ride/Docs/Protocol_for_Interventions.pdf)

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